

EDMOND

So she's doing it.

ALPHONSE

Did you think she would change her mind?

EDMOND

I don't think about it.

ALPHONSE

No?

EDMOND

No.

ALPHONSE

All of Paris is talking about it, and you don't think of it, or her. Curious.

EDMOND

She has been known to change her mind.

ALPHONSE

Not this time. She has to do something. La Samaritaine was an utter failure. She lost millions on it.

EDMOND

It was a critical triumph.

ALPHONSE

Which is absolutely what she tells her creditors. What are you yelling at me about, it was a critical triumph. As they cart off her furniture. I didn't need furniture anyway, it was a critical triumph. As they repossess her gowns--

EDMOND

Enough.

ALPHONSE

It matters not that I am left in my underwear! It was a critical triumph!

EDMOND

You are as histrionic as she.

ALPHONSE

Histrionic. Is not a kind word.

EDMOND

My apologies. It is never my intent to be ingracious.

ALPHONSE

You look terrible. You look like you haven't slept in a week.

EDMOND

Closer to two.

ALPHONSE

Sarah says she hasn't seen you.

EDMOND

I went as soon as I was back in the city.

ALPHONSE

Since then.

EDMOND

I have a baby. I have a play. I have a wife.

ALPHONSE

I'm not going to go back and tell her that.

EDMOND

Oh please.

ALPHONSE

Why will you not go see her? She is asking for you, she needs you!

EDMOND

(flaring)

You cannot pretend this is a simple situation. This is not--a small thing, it's not a dalliance. It's a catastrophe. I have to stay away and you know it.

ALPHONSE

What does it matter to stay away if all you can then do is wander around the streets of Paris, looking at pictures of her?

EDMOND

Would you deny me this small comfort? To see her, in your beautiful visions of her?

They look at his poster.

ALPHONSE

La Samaritaine. I prefer it of all of them. She is so graceful, at peace. Angelic even. You allowed her to be a Jew. I think it made her happy. I don't know about Hamlet.
(to Edmond)
The poster. Not the play.

EDMOND

I took your meaning.

ALPHONSE

Rostand. You are in love with her, of course, what of it? We all are.

EDMOND

She lives inside me. She lives inside my words. She is everywhere, in my sleep, in my dreams, in my daydreams, in the air, in the moon, the owl, the laughter of my children. Everything brings me to her. When I am with her, the reality of her--sometimes, I am afraid it makes everything else impossible. My whole life becomes impossible.

ALPHONSE

Love is always a predicament.

EDMOND

Oh thank you.

ALPHONSE

I mean it is! And she--well--if love is a predicament, loving her is perhaps... I cannot say what it might be. Beyond...

EDMOND

Yes.

He cannot say more than that. Alphonse nods, with some compassion.

ALPHONSE

(off poster)

So easy to make her beautiful. Medea! The floating dead children at her feet, a dagger in her hand, you couldn't do it, couldn't even attempt it if she didn't command the whole composition with those haunted eyes. Gismonda, who cared what the play was about, the name is pretty and she is glorious. Lorenzaccio even, she calls him a fop, which is ridiculous, he was no fop, she was just so sensuous in that costume. Hamlet, of course, is impossible. The ghost of the dead father takes over everything. Ophelia, beauty, madness, flowers, perfection, that's good, but she's a subplot. What is Hamlet? Who can say. Her hair looks terrible.

EDMOND

You mean his hair.

ALPHONSE

You would say that, but you can't. Do you like it?

EDMOND

No.

ALPHONSE

No, don't spare my feelings.

EDMOND

You just told me you didn't like it!

ALPHONSE

That's different.

(remembering it)

La Dame aux Camélias, completely rapturous, the thing painted itself. If only we could have her die for us forever.

Blackout.